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OUTCOME OF THE CONFERENCE, INCLUDING A PLAN OF ACTION FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

Draft Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation: submitted by the Chairman of the Open-ended Drafting Group of the Main Committee

The World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction,

Having met at Yokohama from 23 to 27 May 1994,

Recognizing the rapidly rising world-wide toll on human and economic losses due to natural disasters,

Recalling the decision of the General Assembly in its resolution 44/236 of 22 December 1989 to launch a far-reaching global undertaking for the 1990s to save human lives and reduce the impact of natural disasters,

Recalling also the forward-looking decision of the General Assembly in its resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 to adopt an integrated approach for disaster management in all its aspects and to initiate a process towards a global culture of prevention,

Recognizing that sustainable economic growth and sustainable development cannot be achieved in many countries without adequate

measures to reduce disaster losses, and that there are close linkages between disaster losses and environmental degradation, as emphasized in Agenda 21, 1/

Reaffirming the Rio Declaration, 2/ in particular Principle 18, which stresses the need for the international community to assist States afflicted by natural disasters and other emergencies that are likely to produce sudden harmful effects in the environment of those States,

Reaffirming also the role assigned by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, through the IDNDR secretariat in charge of the Decade, in promoting and directing activities of the IDNDR in conformity with General Assembly resolution 46/182,

Emphasizing the need for the United Nations system to pay special attention to the least developed and land-locked countries and small island developing States, and recalling in this regard that the outcomes of the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s call for giving priority attention to small island developing States and least developed countries in the activities of the Decade,

Responding to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 48/188 of 23 December 1993 to:

(a) Review the accomplishments of the Decade at national, regional and international levels;

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution 1, annex II.

2/ Ibid., annex I.

(b) Chart a programme of action for the future;

(c) Exchange information on the implementation of Decade programmes and policies;

(d) Increase awareness of the importance of disaster reduction policies;

1. Appeals to the world, at the time of reaching the mid-point of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and in the light of increasing human losses and damage caused by disasters and acting in a new spirit of partnership to build a safer world, based on common interest, sovereign equality and shared responsibility to save human lives, protect human and natural resources, the ecosystem and cultural heritage, to reaffirm its commitment to pursuing, through national, regional and international efforts, the transformation of the International Framework of Action for the Decade into a decisive intersectoral Plan of Action;

2. Invites all countries to defend individuals from physical injuries and traumas, protect property and contribute to ensuring progress and stability, generally recognizing that each country bears the primary responsibility for protecting its own people, infrastructure and other national assets from the impact of natural disasters, and accepting at the same time that, in the context of increasing global interdependence, concerted international cooperation and an enabling international environment are vital for the success of these national efforts;

3. Adopts the following Principles, Strategy and Plan of Action.

I. PRINCIPLES

1. Risk assessment is a required step for the adoption of adequate and successful disaster reduction policies and measures.

2. Disaster prevention and preparedness are of primary importance in reducing the need for disaster relief.

3. Disaster prevention and preparedness should be considered integral aspects of development policy and planning at national, regional, bilateral, multilateral and international levels.

4. The development and strengthening of capacities to prevent, reduce and mitigate disasters is a top priority area to be addressed during the Decade so as to provide a strong basis for follow-up activities to the Decade.

5. Early warnings of impending disasters and their effective dissemination using telecommunications, including broadcast services, are key factors to successful disaster prevention and preparedness.

6. Preventive measures are most effective when they involve participation at all levels, from the local community through the national government to the regional and international level.

7. Vulnerability can be reduced by the application of proper design and patterns of development focused on target groups, by appropriate education and training of the whole community.

8. The international community accepts the need to share the necessary technology to prevent, reduce and mitigate disaster; this should be made freely available and in a timely manner as an integral part of technical cooperation.

9. Environmental protection as a component of sustainable development consistent with poverty alleviation is imperative in the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters.

10. Each country bears the primary responsibility for protecting its people, infrastructure, and other national assets from the impact of natural disasters. The international community should demonstrate strong political determination required to mobilize adequate and make efficient use of existing resources, including financial, scientific and technological means, in the field of natural disaster reduction, bearing in mind the needs of the developing countries, particularly the least developed countries.

A. Basis for the Strategy

1. Natural disasters continue to strike and increase in magnitude, complexity, frequency and economic impact. Whilst the natural phenomena causing disasters are in most cases beyond human control, vulnerability is generally a result of human activity. Therefore, society must recognize and strengthen traditional methods and explore new ways to live with such risk, and take urgent actions to prevent as well as to reduce the effects of such disasters. The capacities to do so are available.

2. In this context the least developed countries, small island developing States and land-locked countries are the most vulnerable countries, as they are the least equipped to mitigate disasters. Developing countries affected by desertification, drought and other types of natural disasters are also equally vulnerable and insufficiently equipped to mitigate natural disasters.

3. In all countries the poor and socially disadvantaged groups suffer most from natural disasters and are least equipped to cope with them. In fact disasters contribute to social, economic, cultural and political disruption in urban and rural contexts, each in its specific way. Large-scale urban concentrations are particularly fragile because of their complexity and the accumulation of population and infrastructures in limited areas.

4. Some patterns of consumption, production and development have the potential for increasing the vulnerability to natural disasters, particularly of the poor and socially disadvantaged groups. However, sustainable development can contribute to reduction of this vulnerability, if planned and managed in a way to ameliorate the social and economic conditions of the affected groups and communities.

5. Vulnerable developing countries should be enabled to revive, apply and share traditional methods to reduce the impact of natural disasters, supplemented and reinforced by access to modern scientific and technical knowledge. The existing knowledge and know-how should be studied and efforts should be made to ameliorate, develop and better apply them today.

6. Global social stability has become more fragile and reduction of natural disasters would contribute to reducing this fragility. In the effort towards effective disaster management, the full continuum from relief through rehabilitation, reconstruction and development to prevention must be the concept guiding actions towards the reduction of human and physical losses which remains the ultimate objective.

7. Notwithstanding the full continuum, disaster prevention is better than disaster response and achieving the goals, objectives and targets of the Decade as adopted by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly would result in greatly reducing disaster losses. This requires maximum participation at community level which can mobilize considerable potential and traditional expertise in the application of the preventive measures.

B. Assessment of the status of disaster reduction midway into the Decade

8. Approaching the mid-point of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the World Conference has identified, on the basis of national reports and technical discussions, the following main accomplishments and failures:

(a) Awareness of the potential benefits of disaster reduction is still limited to specialized circles and has not yet been successfully communicated to all sectors of society, in particular policy makers and the general public. This is due to a lack of attention for the issue, insufficient commitment and resources for promotional activities at all levels;

(b) At the same time, however, activities during the first years of the Decade in training, technical applications and research at local, national and international levels and in regional cooperation, have had positive results in some regions in reducing disaster losses;

(c) Equally, the creation of the organizational framework called for by the General Assembly, which includes National Decade Committees and Focal Points and, at the international level, the Special High-Level Council, the Scientific and Technical Committee and the Decade secretariat, has laid the basis for intensified preventive and preparedness efforts in the second half of the Decade;

(d) These new efforts in the field of disaster reduction have not systematically been part of multilateral and bilateral development policies;

(e) Education and training programmes and facilities for people professionally involved and the public at large have not been sufficiently developed with a focus on ways and means to reduce disasters. Also the

potential of the information media, industry, scientific community and the private sector at large has not been sufficiently mobilized;

(f) It must be noted that not all entities of the United Nations system have contributed to the Decade's implementation to the extent possible and desired by the General Assembly in adopting its resolution 44/236. In recent years emphasis has again been placed primarily on disaster response both within the United Nations and beyond. This has slowed down the momentum of the Decade's initial phase, based on the consensus of the importance of action before disasters strike;

(g) A number of positive results have been achieved during the first five years of the Decade, although unevenly and not in the concerted and systematic way as envisaged by the General Assembly. Only if these achievements are recognized, consolidated and accelerated, will the Decade be able to reach its goals and objectives and contribute to the development of a global culture of prevention. In particular the existing tools which can yield improvements in disaster response, as part of a comprehensive approach towards disaster management, are not always utilized to the full extent of their potential;

(h) There is a strong need to strengthen the resilience and self-confidence of local communities to cope with natural disasters through recognition and propagation of their traditional knowledge, practices and values as part of development activities;

(i) Experience has demonstrated that, although not a part of the mandate of the Decade, the concept of the disaster reduction should be enlarged to cover natural and other disaster situations including environmental and technological disasters (Na-Techs) and their interrelationship which can have a significant impact on social, economic, cultural and environmental systems, in particular in developing countries.

C. Strategy for the Year 2000 and beyond

9. The World Conference, based on adoption of the Principles and the assessment of the progress accomplished during the first half of the Decade, has formulated a Strategy for Disaster Reduction centred on the objective of saving human lives and protecting property. The Strategy calls for an accelerated implementation of a Plan of Action to be developed from the following points:

(a) Development of a global culture of prevention as an essential component of an integrated approach to disaster reduction;

(b) Adoption of a policy of self-reliance in each vulnerable country and community comprising capacity-building as well as allocation and efficient use of resources;

(c) Education and training in disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation;

(d) Development and strengthening of human resources and material capabilities and capacity of research and development institutions for disaster reduction and mitigation;

(e) Identification and networking of existing centres of excellence so as to enhance disaster prevention, reduction and mitigation activities;

(f) Improvement of awareness in vulnerable communities, through a more active and constructive role of the media in respect of disaster reduction;

(g) Involvement and active participation of the people in disaster reduction, prevention and preparedness, leading to improved risk management;

(h) In the second half of the Decade, emphasis should be given to programmes that promote community-based approaches to vulnerability reduction;

(i) Improved risk assessment, broader monitoring and communication of forecasts and warnings;

(j) Adoption of integrated policies for prevention of, preparedness for, and response to, natural disasters and other disaster situations including environmental and technological hazards;

(k) Improved coordination and cooperation among ongoing national, regional and international disaster research activities, at universities, regional and subregional organizations and other technical and scientific institutions, having in mind that links between causes and effects, inherent to all types of disaster, should be investigated through interdisciplinary research;

(l) Effective national legislation and administrative action, higher priority at the political decision-making level;

(m) Placing higher priority on the compilation and exchange of information on natural disaster reduction, especially at regional and subregional levels, through the strengthening of existing mechanisms and improved use of communication techniques;

(n) Promotion of regional and subregional cooperation between countries exposed to the same natural hazards through exchange of information, joint disaster reduction activities and other formal or informal means including the establishment or strengthening of regional and subregional centres;

(o) Making available the existing technology for broader application to disaster reduction;

(p) Integration of the private sector in disaster reduction efforts through promotion of business opportunities;

(q) Promotion of the involvement of non-governmental organizations in natural hazard management, in particular those dealing with environmental and related issues and including indigenous non-governmental organizations;

(r) Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to assist in the reduction of losses from natural and related technological disasters, including coordination and evaluation of activities through the Decade and other mechanisms.

II. PLAN OF ACTION

A. Recommendations for action

10. Based on the Principles and the Strategy and taking into account information provided to the Conference in the national summary reports presented by a large number of countries and in the scientific and technical presentations, the Conference adopts a Plan of Action for the future, comprising the following specific actions to be implemented at the community and national levels, the subregional and regional levels, and the international level, through bilateral arrangements and international cooperation.

1. Activities at the community and national levels

11. During the remaining part of the Decade all countries are called upon to:

(a) Express the political commitment to reduce their vulnerability, through declaration, legislation, policy decisions and action at the highest level, which would require the progressive implementation of disaster assessment and reduction plans at the national and community levels;

(b) Encourage continued mobilization of domestic resources for disaster reduction activities;

(c) Develop a risk assessment programme and emergency plans focusing efforts on disaster preparedness, response and mitigation, and design projects for subregional, regional and international cooperation, as appropriate;

(d) Develop documented comprehensive national disaster management plans with emphasis on disaster reduction;

(e) As appropriate, establish and/or strengthen National Committees for the Decade or clearly identified bodies charged with the promotion and coordination of disaster reduction actions;

(f) Take measures to upgrade the resistance of important infrastructure and lifelines;

(g) Give due consideration to the role of local authorities in the enforcement of safety standards and rules and strengthen the institutional capacities for natural disaster management at all levels;

(h) Consider making use of NGO support for improved disaster reduction at the local level;

(i) Incorporate disaster reduction prevention or mitigation in socio-economic development planning based on the assessment of the risk;

(j) Consider the possibility of incorporating in their developmental plans the conducting of Environmental Impact Assessments with a view to disaster reduction;

(k) Clearly identify specific disaster prevention needs which could use the knowledge or expertise that may be available from other countries or from the United Nations system, for instance, through training programmes designed to enhance human resources;

(l) Endeavour to document all disasters;

(m) Incorporate cost-effective technologies in reduction programmes, including forecasting and warning systems;

(n) Establish and implement educational and information programmes aimed at generating general public awareness, with special emphasis on policy makers and major groups, in order to ensure support for, and effectiveness of, disaster reduction programmes;

(o) Enrol the media as a contributing sector in awareness raising, education and opinion building in order to increase recognition of the potential of disaster reduction to save human lives and protect property;

(p) Set targets which specify how many distinct disaster scenarios can reasonably be given systematic attention by the end of the Decade;

(q) Stimulate genuine community involvement and empowerment of women and other socially disadvantaged groups at all stages of disaster management programmes in order to facilitate capacity building, which is an essential precondition for reducing vulnerability of communities to natural disasters;

(r) Aim at the application of traditional knowledge, practices and values of local communities for disaster reduction, thereby recognizing these traditional coping mechanisms as a valuable contribution to the empowerment of local communities and the enabling of their spontaneous cooperation in all disaster reduction programmes.

2. Activities at the regional and subregional levels

12. Considering the many common aspects of disaster vulnerability among countries of a same region or subregion, cooperation among them should be strengthened by implementing the following actions:

(a) Establishing or strengthening of subregional or regional centres for disaster reduction and prevention which, in cooperation with international organizations and with a view to enhancing national capabilities, would perform one or more of the following functions:

(i) Collecting and disseminating documentation and information to improve public awareness of natural disasters and the potential to reduce their impact;

(ii) Formulating education and training programmes and technical information exchanges aimed at human resource development;

(iii) Supporting and strengthening natural disaster reduction mechanisms;

(b) Given the importance of vulnerability of developing countries, particularly least developed countries, technical, material and financial resources should be made available in support of concerned subregional or regional centres to strengthen regional and national capacities to reduce natural disasters;

(c) Improving the communications on natural disasters among the countries of the region in the context of preparedness and early warning systems;

(d) Establishing and/or strengthening early warning mechanisms for disaster reduction;

(e) Commemorating the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction;

(f) Establishing mutual assistance agreements and joint projects for disaster reduction within and between regions;

(g) Reviewing periodically in regional political forums the progress made on disaster reduction;

(h) Request and enable regional organizations to play an effective role in the implementation of relevant regional plans and programmes on natural disaster reduction;

(i) The international community should give highest priority and special support to activities and programmes relating to natural disaster reduction at subregional or regional level in order to promote cooperation between countries exposed to the same risks;

(j) As decided by the General Assembly, special attention should be given to the least developed countries in support of their activities in the field of natural disaster reduction;

(k) Regional arrangements should be carried out in close coordination with and should supplement the national programmes for disaster reduction;

(l) The international community should assist the developing countries in establishing measures to integrate disaster prevention and reduction within the existing machinery and strategies at the national, subregional and regional levels for poverty eradication in order to achieve sustainable development.

3. Activities at the international level, in particular through bilateral arrangements and multilateral cooperation

13. In the context of global interdependence and in the spirit of international cooperation, all activities to reduce disasters, in particular those laid down by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction should be encouraged and supported in the following ways:

(a) It is recommended that extrabudgetary resources be provided for implementation of the Decade and, therefore, that voluntary contributions from Governments, international organizations and other sources, including the private sector, be strongly encouraged. To this end, the Secretary-General is urged to ensure an effective and efficient administration of the Trust Fund for the Decade, established as requested in General Assembly resolution 44/236;

(b) It is recommended that donor countries should increase the priority on disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness in their assistance programmes and budgets, either on bilateral or multilateral basis, including increasing contributions to and through the Decade Trust Fund, in order to support fully the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, particularly in developing countries;

(c) Disaster prevention and mitigation should become an integrated component of development projects financed by multilateral financial institutions, including the regional development banks;

(d) Integration of natural disaster reduction into development assistance programmes, through effective means, including as suggested in subparagraph 13 (b) above;

(e) Ensuring the cooperation in the area of research and science and technology development related to natural disaster reduction in order to enhance the capacities of the developing countries to reduce their vulnerability in this respect;

(f) The Trust Fund for the Decade should give priority in financing the establishment and strengthening of the early warning systems of the disaster prone developing countries particularly of the least developed, land-locked and small island developing States;

(g) Ensuring that from the formulation phase development projects be designed in a way to contribute to reducing, and not increasing, vulnerability to disasters;

(h) Improving the exchange of information on disaster reduction policies and technologies;

(i) Encouraging and supporting ongoing efforts aimed at developing appropriate indicators of vulnerability (indices);

(j) Reaffirmation of the roles of the Special High-Level Council and the Scientific and Technical Committee in promoting Decade activities, in particular the awareness of the benefits of disaster reduction;

(k) Enhancing the activities of, and cooperation between, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector related to disaster reduction, including more efficient use of existing resources;

(l) Supporting efforts of Governments at the national and regional levels in the implementation of the priority areas of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, and the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, related to the management of natural and environmental disasters through measures referred to in paragraph 13 (b) above;

(m) Providing wider support for the existing mechanism for disaster management and reduction of the United Nations system, in order to expand its capacity to give advice and practical assistance, as required, to countries facing natural disasters and other disaster situations including environmental and technological hazards;

(n) Providing adequate support for Decade activities, including those of the secretariat of the Decade, in particular with a view to ensuring the timely implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. In this regard it is time to consider proposals on ways and means to ensure functional security and continuity of the secretariat of the Decade, to the extent possible through the United Nations regular budget;

(o) Recognition of the need for adequate coordination of international disaster reduction activities and strengthening of the mechanisms established for this purpose. International coordination should relate, in particular, to the formulation of development projects which provide assistance for disaster reduction and their evaluation;

(p) Establishment or improvement, as a priority, of national, regional and international warning systems and more effective dissemination of warnings;

(q) Effective coordination of international disaster management, in particular by the United Nations system, is paramount for an integrated approach to disaster reduction and should, therefore, be strengthened;

(r) Holding of a review conference on natural disaster reduction at the end of the Decade in order to map a strategy for continued disaster reduction activities into the twenty-first century.

B. Proposals to the Conference*

III. FOLLOW-UP ACTION

14. With the aim of ensuring the early and successful implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, the Conference decides to:

(a) Transmit the report of the World Conference containing the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session;

(b) Request the General Assembly to consider adopting a resolution endorsing the Yokohama Strategy and making an appeal to all countries to continue working towards the objective of a safer world for the twenty-first century;

(c) Transmit the outcome of the World Conference to the mid-term global review conference on the implementation of the Programme of Action for least developed countries, to be held in 1995, as decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/171, and to the Commission on Sustainable Development in the initial review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, undertaken by the Commission in 1996, in accordance with the Commission's Multi-Year Programme of Work;

(d) Reaffirm the crucial importance of a substantial reduction in the loss of lives and in the physical damage caused by disasters by the year 2000 and of continuing the disaster reduction process beyond the end of this century, as appropriate;

(e) Request the Secretary-General to ensure that the outcome of the Conference be given as wide as possible dissemination, including transmission of the Yokohama Strategy to relevant international and regional organizations, multilateral financial institutions and the regional development banks;

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* To be included in an annex to the report of the Conference.

(f) Request also the secretariat of the Decade to communicate the outcome of the Conference to national committees and focal points for the Decade, relevant non-governmental organizations, scientific and technical associations and the private sector, and to facilitate the review of the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action and further planning by these institutions at the regional level before the year 2000;

(g) Request the Secretary-General to submit an annual report to the General Assembly, based on information provided by Governments, regional and international organizations, including the multilateral financial institutions and the regional development banks, the United Nations system and the non-governmental organization community, on progress made in the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy;

(h) Recommend the inclusion of a sub-item entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction" in the provisional agenda of the Assembly under the item entitled "Environment and sustainable development";

(i) Request the United Nations, through the secretariat of the Decade, to provide Governments, upon request, with technical assistance in the preparation and development of disaster management plans and programmes.